

The Balancing Act



If you fall in that “older worker” category, balancing work and family responsibilities can be overwhelming. You may have teenagers still at home, elderly parents who need care, grandchildren to tend, community demands, and a job—all at the same time! Workers over the age of 50 are often “caught in the middle” with family demands coming from both children and parents. How can you do it all?

AARP reports that nearly 22 million American workers are caregivers for their parents or loved ones. On the average, caregivers who work outside the home spend more hours each week caring for an older adult family member who lives with them than they spend at their job.

The Law...

Since 1993, federal law offers some support for working caregivers through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). This allows eligible workers up to 12 weeks a year of unpaid leave for family caregiving without loss of job security or health benefits.

Although valuable, FMLA does not help those who cannot afford to take unpaid leave. It also has restrictions; such as company size and the amount of time a worker has been employed that keep many from being covered.

What can **YOU** do to balance your time?

Learn your company's policy about caregiving.

Find out whether there is an Employee Assistance Program. Take advantage of flextime policies. Offer to work a less-desirable shift to get flextime. Consider job-sharing or working part time if it could work for you.

Whenever possible, avoid mixing work with caregiving.

If you have to make phone calls or search the Internet for information related to your parent's needs, do it on your lunch break. Schedule a telephone hour at work. This might be during lunch, when the older person, family or doctors may call you.

Manage your time well at home and at work.

Set priorities and then accomplish the most important items on your list first. Delegate responsibilities at work and at home; others can almost always take some of the burden. Pace yourself and don't do so much in one area that you can't be effective in another.

Get all the support you can from community resources.

Contact your local government to find out about aging services that might be available in your area. These services may provide support for you and the person you are caring for.

Take care of your own needs. Pay attention to your health. Eat right, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly. Try to make time to enjoy yourself even when your schedule is packed. Take a break when the pressure gets too great; even a short walk or hot bath can help relieve the stress. Talk to someone about your feelings and needs: an employee assistance counselor, a professional counselor, or a member of the clergy.

Schedule separate time for the older person and your family. Everyone should know which time is theirs. For older persons living out of town, you might spend a week or weekend every month with them, depending on their condition.

Invest time or money in things that will help you manage tasks. Consider using a computer, bookkeeper, housekeeper or community resources.

Accept your limitations. Get help from another family member, a neighbor or community services when you need to take a break. What caretaking responsibilities could you give up to make life easier for you?

Make sure other family members are involved. Involve your spouse and children in planning and make sure to have couple and family time alone.

For aging services in Utah, see: <http://www.utahagingservices.org>
Caregiver Magazine: <http://www.caregiver911.com/>